



National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

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Apostle Islands News Release

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Apostle Islands National Lakeshore Implements Emergency Restrictions to Protect Park Fishery Resources from Deadly Fish Virus

Apostle Islands National Lakeshore superintendent Bob Krumenaker announced that several emergency restrictions have been issued to protect the park's fishery resources from viral hemorrhagic septicemia (VHS), effective April 12. These emergency restrictions will prohibit the exchange of ballast water by ships within the Apostle Islands National Lakeshore boundary, will require the decontamination of all watercraft, gear, and equipment prior to launching from land into park waters, and will restrict the use of specific fishing baits that are known vectors for VHS. All State of Wisconsin rules for fishing and limiting the spread of VHS still apply within the National Lakeshore except in these few cases where the NPS restrictions are more stringent.

VHS is a deadly fish virus that has recently been detected in all of the lower Great Lakes and several inland lakes. It is spreading rapidly and is known to cause large scale fish kills in 32 species of fresh water fish, 28 of which occur in the Lake Superior Basin. The virus has not yet been detected in Lake Superior, but has significant potential to impact the ecological integrity of fish populations and recreational fishing opportunities throughout the basin. The virus, which is known to emerge and spread rapidly in the early spring, does not impact humans.

The four units of the National Park System on Lake Superior (Isle Royale National Park, Apostle Islands and Pictured Rocks National Lakeshores, and Grand Portage National Monument) and the Grand Portage Band of the Lake Superior Chippewa recently approved a plan to protect park and tribal fishery resources from VHS. The plan identifies six major categories of vectors that could cause the spread of VHS into and within these parks and reservation waters, analyzes the likelihood (relative risks) associated with each of these vectors, and includes recommendations on what must be done to mitigate the threat posed by that specific risk. The highest risk vectors include the use of VHS infected bait by anglers, the spread of VHS by infected water and/or fish in boats, agency and tribal operations, and untreated ballast water exchange. The full NPS VHS Prevention and Response Plan can be accessed at <http://www.nps.gov/apis/parkmgmt/vhs.htm>.

“The plan developed by the National Park Service to protect critical fishery resources identifies 16 prevention actions. Five need to take effect immediately, prior to the spring emergence of this virus,” Krumenaker explained. “Those five included initiating a public education and outreach program, making sure that all of our own agency operations are above reproach so that we are not contributing to the spread of VHS ourselves, prohibiting ballast water exchange within NPS boundaries, requiring effective decontamination of boats and equipment being launched into park waters, and restricting the use of fishing baits that are known vectors for VHS,” Krumenaker added.

A major focus of the VHS plan is collaboration with other jurisdictions, since close coordination and public cooperation are essential to limit the spread of this disease. “After careful consultation with many subject matter experts, the State of Wisconsin, tribal officials, and local anglers, I have determined that the restrictions issued today are the minimum actions necessary to protect the fishery resources within Apostle Islands National Lakeshore,” according to Krumenaker. “We will continue to carefully monitor the spread of this virus, and to work very closely with the state, tribes, and anglers to do everything we can to protect not only the park, but all local fishery resources,” Krumenaker added.

“We regret very much any inconvenience caused to park visitors by these new requirements,” Krumenaker said. “We have a legal obligation of protect park resources, and it is unfortunate that we find ourselves under almost constant bombardment by some new invasive species. But after careful analysis, I have become convinced that VHS is a serious threat, and I ask all park visitors, boaters and anglers to help us prevent this nasty virus from impacting our fishery resource and this part of our natural heritage.”

The full text of the plan and the new restrictions is available at <http://www.nps.gov/apis/parkmgmt/vhs.htm>

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Editor's note:

The full text of the restrictions is in the attached file.

It may also be found at <http://www.nps.gov/apis/parkmgmt/vhs.htm>